

Rep. Gary Alexander

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Rep. Gary Alexander

1998 Session Review

20th District



May 1998

Dear Friends,

In a rapid-fire 60-day session we were successful in turning back efforts to unnecessarily increase spending and raise taxes. We were careful not to abandon our historic reforms that will make government more accountable and responsible to its citizens. And we approved a supplemental operating budget that results in no net increase in spending.

The 1998 session included important accomplishments for the people of the 20th District, including opportunities for new jobs and protection of natural resources. This newsletter is intended to report on the highlights of the session that will likely affect you and your family. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at my legislative office.

It is an honor to represent you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Gary C. Alexander".

Gary Alexander
State Representative
20th District

Printed on recycled paper

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1998 Session Review

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Holding the line on spending

The 1998 supplemental operating budget adopted by the Legislature reinvested savings from the current 1997-99 biennial budget to enhance priority services such as education, salmon recovery, and community safety. The budget holds the line on overall spending at its current level of \$19.1 billion. This represents the smallest percentage increase in spending in 26 years and is well below the Initiative 601 spending limit.

How can we increase spending for specific services without increasing overall spending? Here is the answer: The purpose of a supplemental budget is to meet urgent needs and make adjustments in the two-year budget that took effect last July. We were fortunate to have more than \$100 million in savings in the current budget due to lower-than-expected school enrollment, fewer Medicaid enrollees, and more people moving from welfare to work under our historic welfare reform policy. We reinvested those savings in priority areas without increasing overall spending.

As vice chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, I served on the six-member team that negotiated the final agreement on the 1998 supplemental operating budget. Following are the enhancements we made with the savings in the budget.

Improving education

The budget provides \$17 million to help youngsters improve reading skills. An additional \$1 million is also provided for Early Childhood Education Assistance Program, which will now serve 7,052 low-income children. The revised 1997-99 spending plan increases funding for K-12 education by more than \$570 million over the previous biennium – money that is going directly into the classroom.

Restoring salmon populations

We added \$26 million in general fund spending to fund a historic salmon-recovery agreement aimed at improving habitat and restoring dwindling salmon runs.

Cracking down on drunk drivers

We provided \$1.2 million in funding to enforce new laws aimed at stopping DUI offenders.

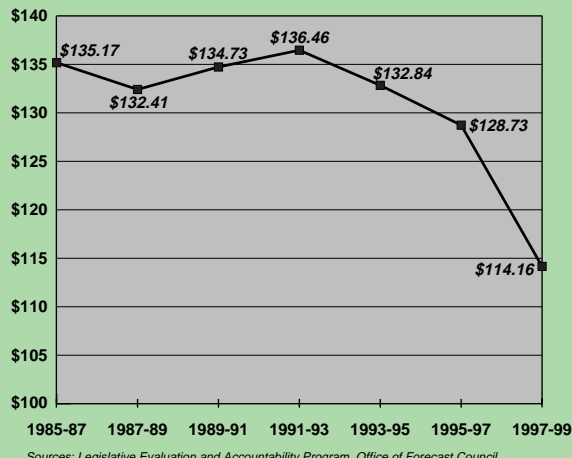
Enhancing services for the needy

The supplemental budget adds \$44.5 million for long-term care and services for people with developmental disabilities. It also increases funding by \$10 million to help people transition from welfare to work and provide health-care coverage for low-income families.

Protecting our communities

Approximately \$26 million is provided for community protection in the supplemental budget to detain dangerous, mentally ill offenders; enhance security at state-run group homes; protect at-risk youth; and support local criminal justice efforts.

**General Fund-State Expenditures
per \$1000 Personal Income**



The 1997-99 operating budget significantly reduces government spending as a percentage of personal income.

Providing opportunities in higher learning

More than \$16 million in new funding is provided for higher education, including \$3 million for the University of Washington to develop the next generation of high-speed Internet systems, \$700,000 for community and technical college equipment, and \$600,000 for training and skill development for students with disabilities.

1998 Session Review



Transportation funding plan approved, 50 percent gas tax increase averted

When the 1998 session began, lawmakers pledged to provide funding to make sorely needed transportation improvements in our state in order to relieve congestion and improve safety on our highways. Despite the governor's call for an increase in the gas tax, we developed a proposal to pay for road improvements using existing resources and without a tax increase of any kind. It would have been unfair to ask citizens to pay more while the state has a large surplus of more than \$800 million. After all, why should we raise your taxes if we don't have too?

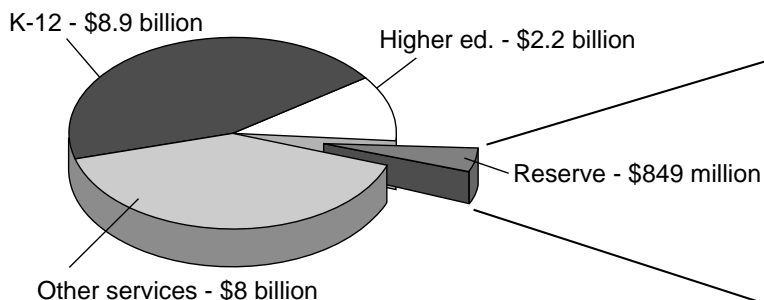
The legislative transportation plan would take motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) revenue that currently goes into general fund – where there is a large surplus — and moves it to the transportation fund. Even after the revenue shift, the general fund is expected to maintain a surplus in excess of \$600 million through fiscal year 2003.

The approved legislative plan will pay for \$2.4 billion in transportation improvements over the next six years, including expansion of the Marvin Road interchange, the addition of a third lane on Interstate 5 between Maytown and 93rd Avenue, and preliminary engineering on a third lane between the Thurston County line and Rush Road. It would also reduce the MVET, which is the tax you pay when you purchase your car tabs, by \$30 per vehicle. The transportation funding proposal will be on the ballot this November.

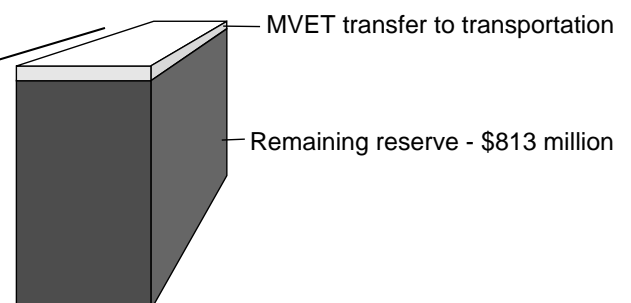


"The legislative transportation funding proposal would use surplus revenue from the general fund to pay for important transportation improvements without the need for a gas tax increase and without affecting other general fund services, including education."

1997-99 general fund



Effect of legislative transportation plan





Creating jobs in the 20th District

Although it was a short session, there was a great deal of attention paid to improving economic growth in distressed areas of the state. While I would like to have seen more accomplished, there were several measures adopted that will create new opportunities for job growth in our communities

Tax fairness paves way for business expansion

I was prime sponsor of a bill that eliminates inequities in our tax system and paves the way for an expansion of a medical laundry facility in Tumwater. The facility currently competes with a publicly owned co-op laundry facility at the University of Washington which is not required to pay taxes. House Bill 2566 exempts similar private facilities from paying B&O service tax, allowing it to compete on an even playing field. With the government co-op not given an unfair competitive advantage, the Tumwater business is expected to increase sales by \$4 million and hire as many as 30 new employees.

Lewis County given option to attract jobs

A pilot program to help distressed counties create more job opportunities will make Lewis County more attractive to large employers. House Bill 3099, which I co-sponsored, allows Lewis County to develop industrial sites outside its urban growth area. This will open up several parcels of land more suitable for industrial development that will give our distressed communities a chance to attract new family-wage jobs.

Building the necessary infrastructure

All too often we heard that the two biggest obstacles to economic vitality were a suitable land site and the infrastructure to support development.

I was prime sponsor of a bill that provides over \$10 million in sales tax credits to distressed counties that invest in infrastructure as a means to promote economic development and job growth. This language was incorporated into the overall transportation funding plan.

Tourism pays dividends

The Legislature also approved a measure that can provide more funding for tourism-related activities that directly increase commerce in local communities. Tourism has been an economic catalyst in our district and I believe the state should reward those efforts to promote tourism that get results. Senate Bill 6541, which was the companion to a bill that I introduced in the House, provides the opportunity for increased state funding for tourism promotion efforts that result in economic growth as evidenced by higher tax revenues among tourism-related businesses.

Teaching children to read to succeed

The results of recent statewide reading assessments show us that about one-half of our fourth-grade students, nearly 38,000, did not meet the new statewide standards for reading. In 84 schools, less than 25 percent of the students are meeting the new reading standards. The need to improve the reading skills of our youngsters is not in dispute.

We've appropriated \$17 million to launch two major reading-improvement initiatives in the coming year.

One would provide teachers with better training in reading instruction methods. More than 30 years of scientific research and academic studies prove that proper phonics instruction is a critical part of effective reading programs. The brain reads by recognizing the letters of the alphabet and letter sounds so that it can "decode" our language. This has been proven most recently by scientists at Yale University who have opened "a window on the brain" and monitored how the brain works when people read.

Yet there are many teachers in kindergarten through second grade — teachers who are responsible for teaching our children to read — who have never received training in phonics instruction and are unaware of the research that proves what works most effectively in teaching students to read. We've provided \$9 million to offer this training for teachers who have not received it so that they will have another tool to help our children succeed. We know that phonics is not the only way to teach kids to read, but it is an essential part of reading instruction that is lacking in some classrooms.

We've also provided \$8 million for teacher and volunteer training to develop summer and after-school tutoring programs.